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ABSTRACT

Four minority groups are identified in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Employer Information Report: (1) Negro; (2) Oriental; (3) American Indian; and (4) Spanish Surnamed Americans. Together, these groups in 1970 numbered about 34.5 million people, or about 17 percent of the population. This paper reports on the status of minority women and, in particular, their status in the job market. A 1973 EEOC report showed that minority women are more underrepresented among "officials and managers" than any other job category. On the other hand, these women are considerably overrepresented in the blue collar categories andin "service work." Not suprisingly in 1972 the median income of minority women who worked full-time year-round was $5,320 compared with $6,131 for white women. The unemployment rate among minority women is almost double that of white women, and there is an especially severe unemployment rate (34.5 percent) among minority teenage women. Most other problems of job status. however, seem to be external to the women themselves. Most of these problems have to do with discrimination in hiring and promotion, low wages paid by employers, the lack of day care and other facilities for working women, and the relatively high general levels of unemployment in the nation that strike women and minorities harder than others. (Author)

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MINORITY GROUP WOMEN

Patricia Cayo Sexton*

Four minority groups are identified in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) "Employer Information Report." They are: (1) Negro, (2) Oriental, (3) American Indian (including Eskimos and Aleuts), and (4) Spanish Surnamed Americans.

Together, these groups in 1970 numbered about 34.5 million people, or about 17% of the entire population. This is a large "minority." Assuming that about half of these are females, about 17.2 million people belong to two occupational minorities at the same time. They are women and they are ethnic minorities.

In the job market, this usually amounts to a double handicap. Indeed, in most respects minority group women are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder--relative to majority women and especially to males. Among these groups, only Orientals (or Asians) are at equivalent levels with the majority group in job earnings and education. Generally, minority women are more likely than other groups to work at jobs that have a low pay-off in earnings, satisfaction, security, status, and opportunity. Generally they have higher unemployment rates and lower educational levels than other groups.

Of these groups, blacks are by far the most numerous--about 22.6 million in 1970. They are almost twice as numerous as the other three minorities combined. Hispanics numbered about 9 million

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in 1971--including more than 5 million Mexicans; 1.5 million Puerto Ricans; 626,000 Cubans; 501,000 Central and South Americans; and 1.4 million of "other" Spanish origin. (U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports).

Minority Population

(in thousands)

	1950	1970
White	134,942	177,749
Negro	15,042	22,580
Indian	343	793
Japanese	142	591
Chinese	118	435
Filipino	62	343
Other*	49	721

* Prior to 1960, excludes persons in Alaska and Hawaii.

Spanish Ethnic Origin, 1971	8,956
Mexican	5,023
Puerto Rican	1,450
Cuban	626
Central or South American	501
Other Spanish origin	1,356

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports.

Asians in 1970 numbered about 2.1 million people--including about 600,000 Japanese, 435,000 Chinese, 343,000 Filipinos, and 721,000 "other" Asians. American Indians were the smallest group, numbering about 793,000.

Studying these minority women is both a fascinating and a staggering assignment. Fascinating because the groups are so

varied and so rich in their own cultures, and staggering for the same reason. So varied are the groups that, for proper understanding, they require a score of scholars and a score of volumes to do them justice.

Moreover, we might wonder why the definition of "minority" is as confined as it is. We deal here not just with racial minorities, but with other "ethnics" as well--specifically Hispanics, 93 percent of whom are classified as white. We might wish to look at some other ethnic groups as well.

There are, for example, as many people of Italian origin in the country as of Hispanic origin, and the immigration from Italy continues to be a large one. There are more women in this country who were born in Italy (about 500,000) than there are women who were born in all Asian countries combined.*

There are also about 5 million people of Polish origin. Many of these groups have strong ethnic identities as well as serious language and job handicaps. About 57 percent of all people of Italian origin have a foreign mother tongue.

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* Between 1960 and 1971 the European immigration dropped from about 139,000 to about 97,000 (the largest numbers in 1971 coming from Greece and Italy). In that same decade, the Asian immigration leaped up from about 25,000 to over 103,000. The immigration from North America also rose, from about 85,000 in 1960 to about 140,000 in 1971, most of the increase coming from the West Indies. The South American immigration remains small (about 21,000 in 1971). More immigrants came from Africa (about 7,000) than from Japan (about 4,400). The largest immigrations in 1971 from single countries were, in order: Mexico (50,103), Philippines (28,400), Cuba (22,000) and Italy (22,000).

The task of systematically pulling together material on minority group women from existing sources is far too large for a single paper. What can be attempted here are some comments about the special job problems of minority women based on the more accessible data.

No federal agency or other research group has made a comprehensive survey of minority group women. Some data can be teased out of a variety of studies. The Census Current Population Reports offer considerable data on some minorities, but they deal neither with women nor with Indian and Asian minorities specifically. The most useful publications are the Census reports "The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States, 1971 (Series P-23, No. 42) and "Selected Characteristics of Persons and Families of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Spanish Origin" (Series P-20, No. 238, 1972).

EEOC has no single publication on equal employment opportunities for minority group women, though it collects and prints much useful data on minorities. Unlike Census reports, however, EEOC data deal only with jobs, and not at all with the many job-related issues.

The Women's Bureau, which generally does not collect its own data, published a pamphlet entitled "Negro Women in the Population and in the Labor Force." This singular publication is based largely on data collected in 1966 and needs updating. The Bureau also publishes a nine-page paper entitled "Facts on Women Workers of

Minority Races" and a three-page "Fact Sheet on Women of Spanish Origin in the United States." Both are concise rather than comprehensive.

Other useful publications are available, such as "The Impact of Manpower Programs on Minorities and Women," sponsored by the Office of Research, Manpower Administration, Department of Labor--and EEOC Research Reports such as "A Profile of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest." Such studies, however, are usually addressed to some one aspect of the whole profile of minority women.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports, "Employment and Earnings," published every month, deal with the job status of blacks and Hispanics, but they are, of course, limited to data on jobs and earnings.

The basic research job, as I see it, would involve pulling together from government and other sources, the information that is already available on minority group women. Beyond that, we need to identify the categories of data that are either not collected or not analyzed according to the racial and ethnic categories that concern us.

While much of this data must inevitably be statistical in form, it might be desirable to include more personalized materials along with the tables in some publications. After all, thousands of people who would turn away in apathy from our statistical reports were avid readers of Oscar Lewis's biographies of Mexican and Puerto

Rican families. Ideally, of course, we would publish reports that the average minority group woman would be eager to read.

The EEOC reports, assembled yearly from employer supplied data, give us current information available on the job status of minority group women. For "security reasons," no information is released on individual employers--only on industries and geographic areas. This is unfortunate. The data would, of course, be enormously more useful if it told us to what extent specific employers were taking affirmative action to comply with the law.

A major problem with this data is that they do not cover small employers. Many minority women work in small shops, including most of the Hispanic and Asian women in the garment industry.

From the 1973 EEOC report we see that minority women are more under-represented among "officials and managers" than in any other job category. They are only 7.8% of all women in this category, while they are 17% of the female labor force. Minority women are also under-represented as sales workers and professionals. Indeed, the only white collar category in which they are not under-represented is "technical" work.

On the other hand, minority women are considerably over-represented in the blue collar categories and in "service work" where they are 29.4% of all female workers.

Asian women alone vary from this pattern. They are under-represented in all blue collar categories except "craft workers" where they are at par. And they are, relative to other women,

considerably over-represented among professionals (where they have three times their "proportional" share of jobs.)

In interpreting these figures, however, it should be kept in mind that many of the newer immigrants, among both Asians and Hispanics, work in small shops that are not covered by EEOC reporting. The same may also be true of Indian women. Undoubtedly these minorities are more heavily represented in blue collar and service jobs than these figures suggest. The EEOC reports cover only 34.2 million people, out of a total civilian work force of about 81 million people.

According to BLS data, there has been a sharp movement of women of racial minorities (89% of whom are black) out of blue collar jobs and into clerical work. In 1960, 81.4% of all minority women were employed in what are essentially blue collar jobs. In 1973, only 58.6% were so employed. At the same time, white women experienced a relatively small movement in that direction. The movement of minority women into professional-technical work was also significant, but their movement into clerical work was highly significant.

Still, more than half (58.6%) of all minority women worked at blue collar jobs.

Not surprisingly, in 1972 the median income of minority women who worked full time year-round was $5,320 compared with $6,[illegible] for white women.

The earnings gap between minority and white women has, however, narrowed significantly since 1960. In that year, minority women earned 70% of the income of white women. In 1972 they earned 87% of their income.

The largest chasm, however, is between the earnings of minority women and men. In 1972 their earnings were 70% of the earnings of minority men and only 49% that of white men. This chasm has narrowed since 1960 by only 7 percentage points in each case.

These figures, of course, cover only employed women. Minority women who are not employed are more likely to suffer economic deprivation than those who are employed. Minority women who do not have husbands present in the households are less likely to be in the labor force than are those with husbands present. The reverse is true for white women.

Moreover, one-third of minority families are headed by women, as compared with only 10% of white families. Among families headed by women who were not working, poverty was about twice as great for minorities.

The unemployment rate among minority women is almost double that of white women, and there is an especially severe unemployment rate (34.5%) among teenage minority girls.

The minorities we have designated include many sub-groups. The black population is more homogeneous than other groups in some ways, but even here we find significant variations. In the last several decades, vast numbers of West Indians have migrated to the

States. The problem of counting them is complicated by the fact that many are reportedly here illegally. Most of them can be classified as black, though large numbers, especially those from Cuba and Dominican Republic are of white or mixed racial origins.

Census reports offer a mass of data from which, with some effort, a profile of the Hispanic woman can be extracted. (Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report, "Selected Characteristics of Persons and Families of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Spanish Origin," Series P-20, No. 238, 1972. For our purposes, we can extract a few of these characteristics.

Hispanic women are less homogeneous a group than black women in that there is significant variation among them based on national origin. The median income of Hispanic families ranged from 89% of all-white family income for Cubans, to 70% for Mexicans, and 58% for Puerto Ricans. Of all major Hispanic groups, Puerto Ricans have the lowest income. In 1969, for example, 29% were below the federal poverty level, about the same as among blacks. The incidence of poverty was 21% among Mexicans and 14% among Cubans.

The main problem is that average earnings per worker, especially the primary worker, are lower for Hispanics than for other white workers. As for Puerto Ricans, the special problem is that the primary worker is often a woman and that labor force participation rates are low for both males and females. Except for Puerto Ricans, the labor force participation for Hispanic men was about the same as for all white men--about 80%. Only 73% of Puerto

Rican men were in the labor force in March of 1972, partly because of health problems. About one in four Puerto Rican men under age 65 who was outside the labor force was disabled by poor health.

Labor Force Participation Rates, Women

Ethnicity	Total	Children under age 6	Children 6-17	No children under 18
White	40.6	28.4	49.0	41.5
Negro	47.5	47.6	59.8	43.4
Spanish: total	38.1	28.4	43.5	41.7
Mexican	37.8	29.8	43.3	40.1
Puerto Rican	29.9	16.6	30.5	39.9
Cuban	47.1	38.6	59.7	45.1

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March 1972

Participation rates are low for both Puerto Rican and Mexican women. About a third of Mexican and about a fourth of Puerto Rican women were in the labor force in March 1972. Participation among all white women was 43%. The low rate of participation among Mexican women was made up for by higher rates of participation among youth in their families.

As contrasted with women in all-white families, the Puerto Rican woman is younger, has a larger family (3.9 members compared with 3.5), is far more likely to have children under age 6 (44% of Puerto Rican families, 40% of Mexican, and about 24% of all white), and when she has young children, she is much less likely to work than other women.

The women most likely to work when they have young children are black and Cuban women, both of whom are twice as likely as Puerto Rican women to work when their children are young.

As children reach school age, participation rates rise for Puerto Rican women to levels comparable to that of other groups.

As for Puerto Rican women who are family heads, only about a fourth worked at all during 1970. Many of the others resorted to public assistance. The average annual earnings for those who did work were only $4,000. Obviously the incentives were not great to enter the labor force.

Asian Americans are even more diverse than Hispanic Americans. Hispanics at least share a common language and often religion. Asians are diverse as to language, culture, religion, national origin and even race. When combined, Asians are considerably more than half of the world's population (numbering some 2 billion, 56 million people in 1970). In our own country they number only somewhat more than two million. Very little is known, statistically or otherwise, about these Asian groups. We do know, however, that the role of women varies greatly, from active participation in the labor force among some groups, to negligible participation among others. On a scale of "liberation," Filipino women are probably found at one end (more liberated than others) and traditional Japanese women and women of Southeast Asia at the other. In some groups, such as the Chinese, women are reportedly active managers in the family but are less active partners in the work place.

The generally rosy picture we get of Asian American socio-economic status may be misleading. While most Asians are by now established here, relatively large numbers have immigrated here in the last decade. Coming as many do from extreme deprivation, they sometimes create a two-class society within their communities. For example, in New York City, many Chinese women who entered under the new immigration law, have been employed under sweat shop conditions in the city. Many others are unemployed and unable to find work. Those who work are often employed in small shops where they are not counted in government statistics. Communication is often difficult. The problem is complicated for Chinese women by the fact that many of the leading citizens speak a different language from that spoken by most Chinese Americans, including the most impoverished ones.

American Indians, also originally an Asian people, are our smallest racial group. So indigeneous are their national origin that they are beginning to call themselves "Natives," to distinguish themselves from the Asian Indians who have migrated here.

The Indian population is at least no longer vanishing. It has in fact doubled in the last few decades. While Indian conditions are improving, they still are extremely deprived. About 40% live below the poverty line, compared with 13.7% of the whole population. Their unemployment rate is three times the national average. In 1960 only about a third lived in cities. By 1970, about half were urban. Those who go to the cities tend to get better jobs and education.

Indians are quite concentrated geographically. In 1970 more than half lived in five states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Oklahoma). More than a fourth lived in the South. Only about 28% now live on the 115 major reservations.

The economic status of reservation Indians varies greatly, ranging from a median of about $2,500 on the poorer reservations to about $6,000 on the more prosperous. While some Indian land is rich in water and resources, much is not productive at all. Moreover, much of it is located at distances too great from work sites to make commuting feasible. A not uncommon pattern is for women to stay at home on the reservation, while the men travel off to work, returning occasionally or on week-ends.

Unlike the Indian women of Canada, those in the States are not disinherited by national law when they marry non-Indians. Indeed, in some tribes--as in some Iroquois groups--inheritance and political decision-making tends to be matriarchal. It is the women alone who elect and depose the tribal chiefs. The far more numerous tribes of the South and Southwest, however, tend to be patriarchal and male dominated.

The job problems of Indians are perhaps complicated by low educational levels. For example, the median years of school completed by residents of Navajo reservations (the most populous tribe in the States) is only 4.1, and only 17% of these residents were high school graduates.

The more difficult problem, however, is that jobs are scarce on or near the reservations. In the Southwest, many of the people

who work are employed by the Indian tribes themselves (and are not counted in EEOC data). In some cases, the tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs are attempting to bring in light industries that offer suitable employment to women.

As for education, in most respects Indian women (among native born women) are the most disadvantaged of minorities, followed closely by native born Hispanics and then by black women. Only 1.8% of Indian women age 25 and over have four years of college, compared with 2.3% of Hispanic, 2.9% of black women; and 6.3% of white women. Women of "other" ethnic groups (mainly Asian) have, on almost all indices, more education than white women. The education status of black women has improved significantly, but even among women age 20-21, 65.3% were high school graduates, compared to 82% of white women.

It is interesting to note that among women 25 and over, American women born in Europe, along with foreign born Hispanic women, had lower educational levels than anyone else. Only 35.6% of these European born women were high school graduates and the median years of school completed was 8.9.

The role of education in improving the job status of minority group women is unclear. The educational levels of black women, for example, are now higher than those of black men, still women lag significantly behind men in earnings. In general, however, it still holds that the higher education levels are, the higher earnings

tend to be. Specialized training beyond high school seems to have the highest payoff. Among non-college educated workers, however, women tend to have at least equivalent general education levels as men, but their earnings and job status lag far behind that of males. Clearly, education is not enough.

Perhaps the most serious job handicap minority women have is a language problem. A large proportion of Hispanic and newly immigrated women from other places are either not literate or not fluent in English. (Among Hispanics about 1 out of 4 adults age 25 or over, reported they could not read and write English in 1969.)

Research is needed to determine the extent to which this problem exists, its effect on the employability of women, and the approaches that can best increase language proficiency.

Also, many women coming from developing countries (Haiti, Korea, Taiwan, etc.) are poorly prepared for an industrial way of life--its speed and its time demands. Training in work skills may be especially useful with them.

Most other problems of job status, however, seem to be external to the women themselves. Most of these problems have to do with discrimination in hiring and promotion, low wages paid by employers, the lack of day care and other facilities for working women, and the relatively high general levels of unemployment in the nation that strike women and minorities harder than others.

For Indian women, the special problem is that there are not enough jobs in and near the reservations or other places where they live. With Puerto Rican women, a large problem is that women withdraw from the work force for much of their life, either because they want to, or because there are insufficient day-care, and other facilities to help them with family responsibilities--or because jobs for Puerto Rican women in the New York metropolitan area are so poorly paid that they do not attract women with children into the labor market.

The biggest problem of minority group women, however, is probably the same as for other women: discrimination in the labor market and in the professional and vocational schools that prepare people for the labor market.

Unfortunately, minority women (with the possible exception of black women) seem to be less aware of discrimination and of their rights to equal opportunity under the law than other women are. But then, middle class women in all groups are more aware of these rights than working class women are, and they are everywhere more active in pursuing them (with EEOC, the courts, the Women's Bureau, etc.). To a great extent, then, the question of "activity" is a class question and is related to the fact that minority women are largely working class. But it is compounded apparently by the ethnic factor and the fact that many minority group women seem to be less active than others in the pursuit of equal job opportunities.

Hispanic, Indian, and Asian women, perhaps accustomed to a more passive role within the family, have not been especially active or assertive in pursuing their own causes. Among Asian women, some leaders feel they should strive for excellence rather than for "their rights." It is not clear, however, that this view is held by the thousands of seriously disadvantaged Asian American women in our cities. The pursuit of excellence and of job rights are perhaps not alternative courses, so much as they are vital supplements to one another.

The problems of organization and activity are complicated for minority women to some extent by dispersal and fragmentation. Since Hispanics and especially Asians and Indians are rather small groups, for maximum effect they need maximum support from their numbers. Hispanics, however, are separated not only geographically (Cubans in Florida, Puerto Ricans in New York, and Mexicans in the Southwest), but also to some extent by competition among the groups.

Asians are fragmented a hundred different ways, and Indians too are separated not only by the remoteness of the many reservations but by the fact that tribes in one part of the country have little contact with tribes in other parts. Some hopeful stirrings of organization among Indian women of the Southwest are to be found, however.

Minority women have also been slow to organize on their jobs. While a large proportion are blue collar and clerical workers, a relatively small proportion are organized into labor unions. Where

they have organized--in hospitals, in government service, as farm workers and para-professionals--they have appreciably increased their earnings and job status. Close to 30% of males, both white and black, are unionized, but only little more than 10% of females. This too may be changing as working class women move toward a national labor organization.

Minority women have not been part of the women's movement. Some steps in that direction might be desirable since the greatest discrepancies in earnings and jobs are not between minority women and other women but between women and men, especially majority men. As it is, the women's movement and equal rights legislation are having some payoff for middle class women, but little for the vast majority of women who work at blue collar and clerical jobs.

Research addressed to the issue of activity and organization might be of great value in improving the job status of minority women--as would research addressed to the question, "How much do minority women know about their status and their rights, and how can they best use that knowledge?"

Our research on this and other matters should be addressed to women who are not in the labor force, as well as to those who are. Unlike majority women, the minority women who are outside the work force appear to have more serious problems--of poverty, poor health and education--than minority women who are in the work force.

Jerolyn Lyle reported recently that "factors directly affecting the behavior of the employer are of more significance vis-a-vis the occupational status of the Spanish-surnamed worker than factors relating to the worker himself or to the community. The implication of such a conclusion is that policy designed to generate changes in corporate processes should receive greater attention. . . "This agrees with a recent finding that, for blacks, a bigger payoff is likely to derive from policies designed to encourage non-discriminatory behavior of employers than from policies designed to improve education or transportation in large cities." More research of this kind is clearly in order. (Jerolyn R. Lyle, "Factors Affecting the Job Status of Workers with Spanish Surnames," April 1973, Monthly Labor Review, p. 14.)

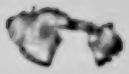

Chart 2

Median earnings of wage and salary workers, by labor union membership, sex, and race, 1970

(Year-round, full-time workers)

Selected Earnings and Demographic Characteristics of Union Members, 1970 Report 417, BLS, 1972